

IN THE SPECIFICATION:

Please replace the paragraph beginning on page 2, line 10,
with the following rewritten paragraph:

--It is speculated that after blood collection natriuretic peptides are degraded by substances such as proteases in blood. To date, some protease inhibitors were added into the samples for the inhibition of the degradation of natriuretic peptides. But, it could not completely inhibit the degradation. The present inventors have speculated that coagulation factors activated by negatively charged solid phase such as glass surface accelerate the degradation of natriuretic peptides when specimens are collected into a container made of glass. The inventors have collected specimens by using a glass container wherein the face coming into contact with a specimen was coated with silicone, and obtained a result that the degradation of natriuretic peptides were inhibited.--

please replace the paragraph beginning on page 7, line 11,
with the following rewritten paragraph:

--(1) Preparation of silicone-coated PET tubes: Commercially available PET tubes (Terumo, Tokyo, Japan) were washed with purified water once, and with 3% (V/V) silicone solution

(SILICONIZE L-25: Ficon Co.) three times. They were washed once again with purified water and dried.--

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Please replace the paragraph beginning on page 8, line 12, with the following rewritten paragraph:

B3
f) As specimen storing containers, glass tubes, silicone coated glass tubes, and plastic tubes were used. Five kinds of plastic tubes, i.e., polystyrene tubes, polypropylene A tubes, polypropylene B tubes, reinforced polyethylene tubes, and acrylic resin tubes were used. f)

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Please replace the paragraph beginning on page 9, line 6, with the following rewritten paragraph:

B4
f) The residual activity of BNP remarkably decreased in glass tubes because BNP was degraded by substances degrading the peptides such as proteases. Conversely, the decrease of the residual BNP activity was suppressed in silicone-coated glass tubes. Furthermore, in plastic tubes made of polyethylene terephthalate, polystyrene, polypropylene, polyethylene or acrylic resin coated with or without silicone, the degradation of BNP was suppressed due to the inhibition of the activation of substances degrading peptides. f)